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ABSTRACT

A study compared the three major American television networks' early evening newscast coverage of 1984 vice-presidential candidate Geraldine Ferraro's financial status, specifically examining the emphasis placed on the story and seeking to determine whether coverage was objective or biased. Early evening network newscasts (excluding weekends) for August 13 through August 22, 1984, were examined for stories relevant to the Ferraro financial turmoil, and then randomly assigned for coding. Results indicated that ABC, CBS, and NBC all emphasized the story by placement and amount of coverage. The Ferraro controversy ranked high in the 24 newscasts studied, with CBS running the story higher in the newscasts and running longer items about Ferraro than the other networks. However, results also indicated that ABC led in emphasis as measured by total number of Ferraro stories, percentage of news stories devoted to Ferraro, and amount of time and percentage of its news hole devoted to her. In fact, ABC devoted 56% more time to Ferraro than did any other network. Findings showed that although more than half of the relevant assertions were made by reporters without attribution of other sources, this did not reflect bias. Most of the reporter-as-source relevant assertions were neutral. Statistical analysis showed that CBS represented a perfect balance, while NBC and ABC were slightly biased in favor of the candidate. (Thirty-three footnotes and five tables of data are appended.) (NKA)

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THE FERRARO FINANCIAL FUROR: HOW THE TELEVISION NETWORKS COVERED IT

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ABSTRACT

THE FERRARO FINANCIAL FUROR:
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Geraldine Ferraro's vice presidential candidacy in 1984 was unique in American politics, and she expected that it would draw its share of media attention. She did not envision, however, the amount of press scrutiny of her family's finances that developed during the campaign. Afterward, Ferraro said she might not have run for vice president had she foreseen the full glare of the media spotlight.

The purpose of this study was to compare the three major television networks' early evening newscast coverage of the Ferraro financial furor. Specifically, the study examined the amount of emphasis placed on the Ferraro story by the networks, and sought to determine whether network coverage was biased. Of the three networks, CBS placed the Ferraro story higher in its newscasts, but ABC devoted more time to the controversy. It was determined that CBS coverage was balanced, but ABC and NBC had a slight bias favoring Ferraro.

THE FERRARO FINANCIAL FUROR:

HOW THE TELEVISION NETWORKS COVERED IT

> I had never thought of myself as a neurotic person, but during the campaign it was hard for me to decide whether I was developing a persecution complex or whether, indeed, I was being persecuted.[1]
>
> Instead of concentrating on campaign strategy, my staff and I were forced to spend too much time keeping the details of the financial furor straight.[2]

With those dramatic words, the first female vice presidential candidate for a major political party, Geraldine Ferraro, remembered the controversial part of her historic 1984 campaign which dealt with financial disclosure, income tax returns, and campaign finance laws. While the New York Daily News screamed in a headline that "Ferraro's Hubby Won't Bare Taxes," the New York Post declared, "Gerry's Hubby in New $torm: Charge Zaccaro Lied on Campaign Funds."[3] Even such respected newspapers as the Philadelphia Inquirer and Newsday proclaimed: "Racketeer donated to Ferraro" and "2 Ferraro Backers Had Organized-Crime Ties."[4]

As she recounted the events surrounding the financial controversy, Ferraro wrote, "No other candidate in history had ever gone so public with his or her financial affairs. But at the same time, no other candidate had ever had to undergo such a siege, both from political opponents and from the press."[5] In her book Ferraro: My Story, she accused some journalists, notably those at the Philadelphia Inquirer, of overkill in covering the financial aspects of the campaign.[6]

Although probably forgotten by many political observers, the hoopla about finances was a part of the Mondale-Ferraro campaign that continued well into 1986, for it was not until early May 1986 that the Justice Department decided to close its criminal investigation into what had become a hot, and some would say, overemphasized part of the last presidential election campaign.[7]

The candidate herself dated the beginning of the financial controversy at August 12, 1984, when she responded to a reporter's question about a forthcoming financial statement she would release the next week. Ferraro told the journalist that her husband, real estate developer John Zaccaro, would not release actual copies of his own tax returns as part of that financial statement, a statement mandated by law, from candidate Ferraro. Instead, she said, Zaccaro would release detailed financial information in lieu of his tax returns since there was no law requiring him to release the returns.[8] (The couple had filed separate tax returns since 1979, when Ferraro became a member of Congress.[9])

But as members of the news media were quick to point out, the ensuing flap about Ferraro's finances encompassed several aspects and dated back to the 1978 primary campaign in which her husband John lent her $110,000,[10] despite a Federal Election Commission ban on loans of more than $1,000 per person.[11] In 1979, Zaccaro was fined $750 for this breach of FEC regulations.[12] The primary election loan issue resurfaced again in the 1984 campaign.

A second aspect of the Ferraro financial coverage dealt with whether, during her years in Congress, she had incorrectly taken a so-called "spousal exemption" on congressional disclosure forms

indicating that she had no knowledge of and received no benefits from her husband's business. As observers of this unfolding political story noted, Ferraro had taken the exemption despite her participation as secretary-treasurer in one of her husband's companies, P. Zaccaro Co., and ownership of a small amount of company stock.[13]

A third aspect of the financial furor that arose during the campaign had less to do with Geraldine Ferraro herself and more to do with husband John's real estate dealings. There was the matter of why Zaccaro, as court-appointed conservator for an elderly woman's estate, had borrowed (and repaid) $175,000, when such practices are widely considered improper.[14] In addition, there were accusations that a firm previously run by Zaccaro's father had from 1963 to 1971 been landlord for a reputed underworld boss, Aniello Dellacroce.[15]

It was a short period of time in August 1984 that the Ferraro/Zaccaro finances were a major issue in the political spotlight. From August 13 through August 22, 1984, much of network television's weeknight reporting of the presidential campaign focused on the Ferraro/Zaccaro family finances. The latter date was the day after Ferraro held a news conference to answer questions about financial disclosure forms she had released on August 20.

After the financial furor had been replaced by other campaign issues, Geraldine Ferraro told television news reporter Connie Chung that the effects of the coverage on her family had been significant. "My kids are devastated," she said.[16] Ferraro said the impact on her husband had been even greater. "What they did was they took my husband, who was standing on the side, pulled him into the ring, and instead of using gloves, they're using knives."[17] In fact, Ferraro

indicated that the furor had been so great that she might have declined the vice presidential nomination had she foreseen it. "I think I would have looked very closely at how many people would have been hurt and I might have said it's not worth it."[18]

Fortune called the significant media attention to Ferraro's finances "mindless hullabaloo" and called for revisions in the financial disclosure laws.[19] Newsweek suggested that the financial disclosure laws were antiquated and sexist, saying, "Ferraro's current problems are rooted in the novelty of her situation--she is the first member of a genuine two-income family to run for national office in the era of full disclosure."[20]

Like their brethren in the print press, television journalists also were thinking about the extent of and possible political implications of the Ferraro financial coverage. ABC anchorman Peter Jennings spoke with news analyst George Will, asking, "Is this a witch hunt or are we involved in a serious investigation?" Will responded dryly, "I think we're not in a witch hunt or a serious investigation. I think we're involved in August. This seems to happen when the humidity is high, and people get a little deranged in Washington."[21]

Will's jest about a witch hunt aside, it is clear from indices and transcripts of the three television networks' weeknight newscasts for the period from August 13 through August 22, 1984, that there were 40 stories out of 339 devoted to the financial controversy.[22] Thus it can be claimed fairly that the Ferraro financial furor constituted part of the networks' news agenda, which in turn helped set the public's agenda of campaign issues to consider. This is particularly significant in a year in which 75 percent of those participating in a Roper survey

said they became best acquainted with the candidates for national election--president and vice president--through television rather than through newspapers, radio, magazines, or other media. In the same survey, 92 percent of the respondents indicated that television does either an "excellent or good" job of covering national news, underlining the fact that most Americans give TV news high marks for believability.[23]

The larger question that remains, however, is whether the television coverage of such national issues as the Ferraro financial furor merits the trust that is placed in it. It is a significant question because how journalists cover politics is widely considered to have an impact on the political process itself, since the conventional wisdom is that public attitude development about politicians and their worthiness or unworthiness to hold office must stem at least partly from the frequency and nature of news reports about them.

This is a question that should be of interest to the public and to journalists, since Geraldine Ferraro is not the first politician to contend that misguided or unfair media coverage has adversely affected a campaign or career. More recently, presidential aspirant Gary Hart has contended, for example, that the press was responsible for his rapid demise as a presidential candidate. "We're all going to have to seriously question the system for selecting our national

leaders that reduces the press of this nation to hunters and presidential candidates to being hunted," he said. [24]

In the case of Ferraro, the question of whether coverage was fair may be of particular interest because of the uniqueness of her candidacy and because of possible implications for how other female candidates might expect to be covered by television journalists not accustomed to reporting on women seeking national political office.

Other studies which have dealt with political reporting have sought to explore this issue by considering several factors. One factor in evaluating news coverage is emphasis, the amount of coverage an issue receives relative to coverage of other stories. Edna F. Einsiedel noted in her study of the "Eagleton Affair" in 1972 that an audience's perception of a media event is certainly influenced by the portion of the news hole devoted to a topic and the position of the story in the newscast (whether it comes first, second, etc. in the program). [25]

In addition to how much time is devoted to a topic in a newscast, researchers have examined whether the content was biased or neutral. Evarts and Stempel wrote in a study of the coverage of the 1972 campaign that if bias were present, imbalance (the decided presence of favorable or unfavorable coverage of an issue) would be present. [26] In addition, the study indicated that the news content should be examined for the sources of statements in stories. For example, whether statements were attributed to sources or not. [27]

It was assumed that a reporter has much greater opportunity to express bias in a statement that is not attributed to anyone than in a statement that is attributed.[28]

One way to quantify imbalance is Janis and Fadner's coefficient of imbalance. The coefficient of imbalance shows "an overall estimate of the degree of imbalance; i.e., the extent to which favorable, neutral, or unfavorable treatment is accorded to the topic or symbol under analysis."[29] In order to use the coefficient of imbalance, a researcher must consider total content (total number of units of content), relevant content (stories relevant to the topic being studied), and irrelevant content (stories irrelevant to the topic.)[30] In order to use this method, researchers must break down news content by assertion (a complete thought as indicated by the presence of a subject, verb, and object).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to compare the three major television networks' coverage on their early evening newscasts of the controversy surrounding the Ferraro financial furor.

Specifically, the study sought to determine the amount of emphasis placed on the Ferraro story by the networks, and to determine whether the networks were objective or biased in their coverage.

The study was limited to the Monday through Friday early evening newscasts of the three major television networks for August 13 through

August 22, 1984. The weekend newscasts were excluded because some were pre-empted for sports coverage, and because the inconsistencies of telecasting of weekend newscasts in general do not invite comparison of coverage.

Emphasis was determined by comparing number of stories relevant to the Ferraro financial furor with total number of stories in the newscasts, comparing air time devoted to the Ferraro story with total news hole, and by comparing placement of the Ferraro stories in the newscasts.

Bias was studied in terms of distribution of relevant assertions by source (reporter, named source or unnamed source); distribution of favorable, unfavorable and neutral assertions; and by coefficient of imbalance.

Definitions

Relevant story: A news item in which the central theme is Ferraro and/or Zaccaro and the financial furor. Stories about other campaign principals, such as Ronald Reagan, Walter Mondale, and George Bush, are not relevant stories if there are only incidental mentions of Ferraro and/or Zaccaro and their finances. However, if an item about Reagan, Mondale, Bush or anyone or anything else has as its central theme a discussion of Ferraro and/or Zaccaro and their finances, it is a relevant story.

Irrelevant story: A news item in which the central theme is not Ferraro and/or Zaccaro and the financial furor. A news story

focusing on a Reagan administration official appearing in a Tennessee court to argue against a desegregation plan for state colleges is considered irrelevant. Commentaries also are considered irrelevant stories because of no attempt in this study to determine the objectivity or bias in obvious opinion pieces.

Relevant story time: The number of minutes and seconds devoted to relevant stories.

News hole: The total amount of time in the half-hour newscasts devoted to both relevant and irrelevant stories; the total time allotted in the half-hour newscasts to news and commentary.

Play position: The placement in each newscast of the first relevant story. If the first relevant story in a newscast also is the first story in a newscast, it is ranked 1; if the first relevant story in a newscast is the second item in a newscast, it is ranked 2, etc.

Assertion: A group of words containing a subject, verb, and object, thus making a complete thought. Several assertions can appear within a single sentence. For example, the statement that "Ferraro arrived at the TV studio" is considered an assertion.

Relevant assertion: An assertion about Geraldine Ferraro and/or her husband, John Zaccaro. It may be coded favorable, unfavorable or neutral in its attitude toward them. For example, the statement that "Ferraro talked with accountants" is considered a relevant assertion.

Irrelevant assertion: An assertion not about Ferraro or her husband, Zaccaro. For example, the statement that "They (anti-abortion demonstrators) drifted away once sure they made their point" is considered irrelevant because it does not have Ferraro or Zaccaro as the object and therefore cannot be favorable.

Favorable assertion: An assertion is favorable to Ferraro or Zaccaro when it portrays her and/or him in a favorable light. For example, the statement that "Her disclosures go far beyond what the law requires" is considered a favorable assertion. An assertion is considered favorable when "loaded" words positive toward Ferraro and/or Zaccaro are used.

Unfavorable assertion: An assertion that treats Ferraro and/or Zaccaro in a negative manner. For example, a statement that "Zaccaro violated a high trust placed in him" is considered negative. An assertion is considered unfavorable when "loaded" words negative toward Ferraro and/or Zaccaro are used.

Neutral assertion: An assertion that is not biased in either a positive or negative direction toward Ferraro and/or Zaccaro. For example, the statement that "Ms. Ferraro was on television today" is considered a neutral assertion. It is a statement of fact without bias. An assertion is considered neutral when no "loaded" words are used but the assertion is made in an objective manner.

Source of assertion: The person to whom the assertion is attributed. Sources may be the reporter, a named source, or an unnamed source.

Reporter as source: No attribution to anyone else is given. The reporter simply makes the assertion as an observer.

Named source: Attribution is given to a clearly identified person; a specified agency, such as "the FBI" when it is readily apparent that this is an official source of the agency; or a specified organization or group, such as "the NAACP" when it is readily apparent that this is an official source of the organization or group. For

example, a spokesman for the FBI or the NAACP, even though not identified by name, is classified as a named source.

Unnamed source: Attribution is not given to a clearly identified person, or an official source of a specified agency, organization or group. For example, "the U.S." is too broad to be a source. However, "the White House" indicates the Reagan administration and is coded as a named source. "Usually reliable source," "a reliable source," and "a source" all are unnamed sources. If the source cannot be traced and identified by person, agency, organization or group it is unnamed. A statement by a source is attributed to that source. For example, in a Ferraro sound bite everything that Ferraro says is coded as from a named source.

Coefficient of imbalance: A statistical concept developed by Irving Janis and Raymond Fadner to provide a single figure that shows the relationship between favorable and unfavorable relevant content. The coefficient's range is from -1.00 (all relevant content is unfavorable) to +1.00 (all relevant content is favorable). Zero indicates the units of unfavorable content and favorable content are equal, or all units of content are neutral, or there is no relevant content.[31]

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to an examination of how the networks reported the Ferraro financial furor. No attempt was made to establish any value judgment on the Ferraro-Zaccaro financial situation, but an attempt was made to determine whether the network coverage was biased (either favorably or unfavorably toward Ferraro) or whether the news

coverage was objective.

Commentaries were excluded from the number of relevant story items and also were excluded from the relevant story time because no attempt was made to determine the objectivity or bias in obvious opinion pieces. This study was concerned with the degree of bias in news stories, not in opinion items.

There were rare instances in which reporters talked with one another on the air about the Ferraro story, sometimes in separate commentaries but twice at the end of news stories. This discussion time, a departure from traditional network practice, was counted as irrelevant story time because it was clearly devoted to expressions of opinion instead of reporting the news.

Coding Procedures

Indices and transcripts from Mediascan of America, Inc., and from the Vanderbilt Television News Archive were examined by the authors to determine news stories relevant to the Ferraro financial furor.

Three journalism graduate students were trained as coders over a period of a week. For the training, they used Mediascan transcripts that included reports on Ferraro. The transcripts, however, were not from the specific time period covered in the study.

First, the coders were instructed in identification of the assertion unit, and were given examples of assertions prepared by the trainer. Then the coders were each given an identical sample transcript and asked to code it independently.

The first sample coding produced, as expected, disagreement on

narrow calls of favorable, unfavorable or neutral. All three coders agreed on 60 percent of the assertions.

Each sample assertion then was studied in group discussion, with reasons given by each coder for the rating given the assertion. At the end of the session, agreement had been reached on all assertions.

A second sample assertion exercise produced total agreement on the number of assertions, and the number of relevant and irrelevant assertions. On identification as favorable, unfavorable or neutral, the coders agreed on 80 percent of the assertions, which is accepted as a respectable reliability factor.[32]

For the study, the 24 newscasts were randomly assigned so that each coder had eight newscasts. Each coder's newscasts were arranged in non-chronological order and each coder's newscasts included some newscasts from each of the three networks.

The coders then were instructed to code the transcripts independently. The coders were told that if there was a question, the assertion was to be ranked, but also discussed later by all three coders and the trainer.

The actual coding was done over a week. When the coders and trainer met for a final session, problem assertions were discussed among the group. All assertions were reconciled.

To provide a systematic method for the authors to verify consistency of coding decisions, the coders did all coding on the transcripts and indices before transferring the information to tally sheets.

The data for each newscast included: number of irrelevant assertions; number of relevant assertions; number of relevant assertions

that were favorable, unfavorable, and neutral in each of these three source categories: reporter, named source, unnamed source; total number of stories; number of relevant stories; total news-hole time; relevant story time, and highest placement of a relevant story.

Answers to specific questions raised by the authors are contained in the Findings and Results section of this report.

Findings and Results

To determine the emphasis given by the networks to the Ferraro financial furor, three factors were examined: (1) number of stories relevant to the Ferraro financial furor compared with total number of stories in the newscasts; (2) air time devoted to the Ferraro story compared with total news hole; (3) placement of the Ferraro stories in the newscasts.

For the eight days studied, the three networks ran a total of 339 stories on their early evening newscasts, a mean of 14 items per newscast. The total number of news stories varied little between the networks, ranging from 110 to 115 items. Forty (12 percent) of the stories concerned the Ferraro financial controversy.

The American Broadcasting Company ran the most relevant stories, 18, which represented 16 percent of its total 115 items. The National Broadcasting Company was second with 13 (12 percent of its 110 stories), and the Columbia Broadcasting System ran the fewest (9, which represented 8 percent of its 114 items). Total stories versus relevant stories are reflected in Table I.

For the same period, the three networks devoted a total of eight

hours, 22 minutes, 59 seconds to news and commentary items in the 12 hours of telecast time, for a mean news hole of 20 minutes, 58 seconds per half-hour newscast.

ABC devoted 56 percent more time to the Ferraro story than did its nearest competitor. Over the eight days, ABC spent 22 percent of its news hole (36 minutes, 37 seconds) on Ferraro. NBC was next with 23 minutes, 25 seconds (14 percent), followed closely by CBS with 22 minutes, 1 second (13 percent). The mean for the three networks was 16 percent of the news hole devoted to Ferraro.

ABC devoted an average of 4 minutes, 35 seconds per newscast to the Ferraro financial furor, compared with 2 minutes, 56 seconds for NBC, and 2 minutes, 45 seconds for CBS. Table II reflects news hole versus relevant story time.

While ABC led in emphasis on Ferraro as indicated by number of relevant stories, percentage of its total items devoted to relevant stories, total amount of relevant story time, and percentage of its news hole devoted to relevant story time, ABC was not the leader in two other emphasis indicators--play position and mean relevant story time.

Play position was considered an emphasis factor. All three networks tended to emphasize the importance of the Ferraro story by placing it high in the newscast, and CBS placed it the highest. Although CBS had no relevant stories about Ferraro on August 14, it began two of its newscasts with the controversy, placed it second in the newscast four other days and fourth once for a mean play position of 1.75.

NBC played Ferraro as its first item four days but ran it so low in the newscast on the other four days that NBC's mean play position was

2.75, still better than ABC. ABC, which used Ferraro at the top of two of its newscasts, had a mean play position of only 3.75.

All three networks led with Ferraro on August 20, the day she and her husband released tax forms for the previous six years and said they would pay $53,549 in back federal income taxes and interest because of an accountant's error on their 1978 joint return.[33]

All three networks also led with Ferraro on August 21, the day she held a press conference to answer questions about her and husband's taxes and financial dealings. August 21 also was the day that she reportedly learned that she and her husband also owed $17,000 in unpaid New York state and city taxes.

NBC also led with Ferraro on August 17, when new questions centered on how much she was involved in her husband's real estate company. That was the day ABC led with John DeLorean, acquitted on drug charges, confering with his lawyers about possible forthcoming indictments on fraud and tax evasion charges. CBS's top story on August 17 was Atlanta Mayor Andrew Young calling Democratic presidential nominee Walter Mondale's campaign advisers "smart-assed white boys who think they know it all."

NBC led its August 14 newscast with John Zaccaro saying he would not release his income tax returns. That was the day CBS, which did not use a Ferraro relevant story, led with America's Olympic gold medal winners being honored. ABC's top story that day was about a policeman admitting he planted the bomb that he had been credited with finding on a bus at Los Angeles. The bus was carrying luggage of Turkish Olympic athletes.

CBS not only had the highest play position mean of the three networks, but it also had the highest relevant story length mean. Although CBS had fewer relevant stories than the other networks, it ran longer stories—an average of 2 minutes, 27 seconds per story, compared with relevant story length mean of 2 minutes, 2 seconds for ABC and 1 minute, 48 seconds for NBC.

To determine the presence or absence of bias by the networks to the Ferraro financial furor, these factors were examined: (1) distribution of relevant assertions by source, (2) distribution of direction of assertions, (3) coefficient of imbalance.

A total of 896 relevant assertions were made in the relevant stories. Fifty-three percent (477) of these assertions were made by the network reporters without attribution. Forty-five percent (400) came from named sources, and 19 (2 per cent) came from unnamed sources.

The American Broadcasting Company reporters had the greatest opportunity to bias their stories in that 61 percent of the ABC relevant assertions came from reporters, compared with 52 percent for the Columbia Broadcasting System and 44 percent for the National Broadcasting Company. NBC, which had the lowest percentage of reporter-as-source relevant assertions, had the highest percentage (54 percent) of named source relevant assertions, followed by CBS with 45 percent and ABC with 37 percent. The networks were about the same in unnamed sources, with about 2 or 3 percent of each network's relevant assertions coming from unnamed sources. Distribution of relevant assertions by source in reflected in Table III.

Although reporters had the apparent opportunity to bias news coverage in their many unattributed assertions, there does not appear to be a positive

relationship between reporter-as-source assertions and bias. Of the networks' 477 total reporter-as-source assertions, 360 (75 percent) were neutral. Table IV indicates favorable, unfavorable, and neucral assertions by source.

Of ABC's 233 reporter-as-source relevant assertions, 183 (79 percent) were neutral, with a fairly even balance between favorable and unfavorable assertions. Likewise, two out of every three CBS and three out of every four NBC reporter-as-source assertions were neutral. However, CBS tended toward more reporter-as-source unfavorable assertions than did the other networks.

In the distribution of total favorable, unfavorable and neutral assertions (Table V), it was clear that a majority of the relevant assertions were neutral. Neutral assertions ranged from 53 percent of NBC's relevant assertions to 59 percent of ABC's relevant assertions. NBC had a higher percentage of favorable assertions (35 percent) than did ABC (26 percent) or CBS (22 percent). CBS ran a higher percentage of unfavorable assertions (22 percent) than did ABC (14 percent) or NBC (12 percent).

To evaluate the overall relationship between favorable and unfavorable relevant assertions for the three networks, the coefficient of imbalance test was applied.

The test showed that the Columbia Broadcasting System had absolutely no direction of bias for or against Ferraro. The coefficient for CBS was 0.00, a perfect score indicating no imbalance at all, because the number of favorable assertions equalled the number of unfavorable assertions. Forty-nine favorable assertions and 49 unfavorable assertions were made in the CBS newscasts. Each category represented 22 percent of the network's total relevant assertions. One hundred twenty-three (56 percent) of the CBS relevant assertions were

neutral. The number of irrelevant assertions for CBS was seven.

Based upon the coefficient of imbalance test, the other networks showed only slight degrees of imbalance in favor of Ferraro. The American Broadcasting Company's coefficient was +0.0277, and the National Broadcasting Company had the highest degree of imbalance, +0.0770. The scale ranges from -1.00 if all relevant content is unfavorable to +1.00 if all relevant content is favorable.

ABC's coefficient was based upon 101 favorable assertions, which represented 26 percent of its total relevant assertions; 54 unfavorable assertions, 14 percent of its total relevant assertions; 227 neutral assertions, 59 percent of its total relevant assertions; and 66 irrelevant assertions.

NBC's coefficient was based upon 103 favorable assertions (35 percent of the relevant assertions); 36 unfavorable assertions (12 percent); 154 neutral assertions (53 percent); and 13 irrelevant assertions.

Summary and Conclusions

The study of the three major television networks' coverage on their early evening newscasts of the Ferraro financial furor shows that ABC, CBS, and NBC emphasized the story by placement and amount of coverage. The Ferraro controversy ranked high in the 24 newscasts studied, with play position means for the networks ranging from 1.75 to 3.75. Twelve percent of the networks' stories and 16 percent of the networks' news hole was devoted to the Ferraro controversy.

CBS ran the Ferraro story higher in the newscasts than did the

other networks and also ran longer items about Ferraro. However, ABC led in emphasis as measured by total number of stories about Ferraro, percentage of its news stories devoted to Ferraro, and amount of time and percentage of its news hole devoted to Ferraro. ABC devoted 56 percent more time to Ferraro than did any other network.

On two of the eight days studied, all three networks led with the Ferraro story. NBC also led with the story on two other days. In addition, the networks' buttressed primary news stories on the furor with sidebars, making the Ferraro story THE political story during the period studied.

Perhaps at least some of this emphasis on the Ferraro story stemmed from the fact that Geraldine Ferraro was the first woman to be nominated for vice president by a major political party. Her campaign was historic, and its novelty created a stir beyond what it might have had the candidate been male rather than female. In addition, some of the emphasis the story received may have been because it came during part of the Republican National Convention in Dallas, a convention that resembled a coronation, since its outcome--the nomination of Ronald Reagan--was a foregone conclusion. Since there was no major controversy at the convention, the Ferraro story may have loomed larger on the horizon.

The findings indicated that more than half of the relevant assertions were made by reporters without attribution. Although it had been believed that a heavy preponderance of reporter-as-source relevant assertions would yield a heavy bias, the findings do not support this theory. Seventy-five percent of the networks' reporter-as-source assertions were neutral. While ABC had the highest percentage of

reporter-as-source relevant assertions, four out of five of those assertions were neutral.

It is heartening to note that most of the reporter-as-source relevant assertions were neutral in view of the fact that 53 percent of the total relevant assertions were made by reporters without attribution. However, some concern should be expressed that only 45 percent of the relevant assertions came from named sources, considering that attribution is one gauge of bias. Still, the traditions of broadcast news are such that attribution is rarely included as often in broadcast news stories as it is in printed-media news stories. Also, broadcast news stories sometimes have visual attribution (pictures of events which serve as reporters' sources for statements) that is not quantifiable if the assertion alone is the measurement unit.

Degree and direction of bias was determined by applying the coefficient of imbalance test to the assertions for each network. This statistical test showed that the coverage of the Ferraro financial furor on "CBS Evening News" was balanced. The coefficient for CBS of 0.00 represented a perfect balance with an equal number of favorable and unfavorable relevant assertions. The coefficients for "ABC World News Tonight" and "NBC Nightly News" showed slight degrees of bias in favor of Ferraro.

From this study, it appears that Geraldine Ferraro's feelings of persecution by the press, at least so far as coverage by the three television networks is concerned, were unfounded, and that she received favorable coverage from two of the three. However, the results of this study cannot be taken to mean that other similar studies are unwarranted. Such additional studies must be undertaken to examine

television coverage of similar political controversies to determine if there is a discernible pattern of political coverage, be it fair and balanced or unfair and biased. Those studies might be particularly beneficial if they explored fully the visual aspects of the coverage.

Endnotes

[1]Geraldine A. Ferraro with Linda Bird Francke, Ferraro: My Story (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1985), p. 162.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid, 157, 159.

[4]David Shaw, "Press and Ferraro: A Case Study," Los Angeles Times, 5 December 1984 (reprint).

[5]Ferraro, Ferraro: My Story, 167.

[6]Ibid, 168.

[7]"In the News," Arkansas Gazette, 7 May 1986, p. 1.

[8]Ferraro, Ferraro: My Story, 156.

[9]Ed Magnuson, "Mistakes and Misunderstandings," Time, September 3, 1984, p. 27.

[10]Michael Posner, "Ferraro Faces the Past," Macleans, August 27, 1984, p. 33.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Ibid.

[13]Walter Shapiro and Margaret Garrard, "Furor Over Ferraro Finances," Newsweek, August 27, 1984, p. 21.

[14]Melinda Beck and Rich Thomas, "The Ferraro Finances," Newsweek, September 3, 1984, p. 22.

[15]Newsweek, August 27, 1984, p. 21.

[16]"NBC Nightly News" Mediascan of America, Inc. Transcript, 24 August 1984.

[17]Ibid.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Anna Cifelli, "The High Price of Disclosure," Fortune, September 17, 1984, p. 136.

[20]Newsweek, August 27, 1984, p. 22.

[21]"ABC World News Tonight" Mediascan of America, Inc. Transcript 16 August 1984.

[22]Mediascan of America, Inc. Indices, 13 August 1984 through 22 August 1984.

[23]Burns Roper, "Public Attitudes Toward Television and Other Media In a Time of Change," (New York: Television Information Office), May 1985, pp. 8, 17.

[24]"ABC World News Tonight" Transcript (Norton), 8 May 1987.

[25]Edna F. Einsiedel, "Television Network News Coverage of the Eagleton Affair: A Case Study," Journalism Quarterly 52 (Spring 1975): 60.

[26]Dru Evarts and Guido H. Stempel III, "Coverage of the 1972 Campaign by TV, News Magazines, and Major Newspapers," Journalism Quarterly 51 (Winter 1974): 646.

[27]Ibid.

[28]Ibid.

[29]Harold Lasswell, Nathan Leites, and Associates, Language of Politics (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press, 1949), p. 155.

[30]Ibid, 156.

[31]Richard W. Budd and Robert K. Thorp, An Introduction to Content Analysis (Iowa City: State University of Iowa, 1963), pp. 18-19; Manny Paraschos and Bill Rutherford, "Network News Coverage of the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon," 1983 (unpublished manuscript), footnote 22, unnumbered page.

[32]Paraschos and Rutherford, p. 6.

[33]References to content of both relevant and irrelevant stories are based upon Mediascan indices and transcripts.

TABLE I

TOTAL STORIES VS. RELEVANT STORIES

NETWORKS	TOTAL STORIES		RELEVANT STORIES		PERCENT OF RELEVANT STORIES	PLAY POSITION MEAN
	8-day Total	Daily Mean	8-Day Total	Daily Mean		
ABC	115	14.38	18	2.25	15.65	3.75
CBS	114	14.25	9	1.12	7.89	1.75
NBC	110	13.75	13	1.62	11.82	2.75
MEAN FOR NETWORKS	113	14.12	13.33	1.67	11.80	2.75

TABLE II

NEWS HOLE VS. RELEVANT STORY TIME
(In minutes and seconds)

NETWORKS	NEWS HOLE		RELEVANT STORY TIME		RELEVANT STORIES' PERCENT OF NEWS HOLE	RELEVANT STORY LENGTH MEAN
	8-Day Total	Daily Mean	8-Day Total	Daily Mean		
ABC	168:33	21:04	36:37	4:35	21.72	2:02
CBS	169:46	21:13	22:01	2:45	12.97	2:27
NBC	164:40	20:35	23:25	2:56	14.22	1:48
MEAN FOR NETWORKS	167:40	20:58	27:21	3:25	16.31	2:04

TABLE III

DISTRIBUTION OF RELEVANT ASSERTIONS BY SOURCE

NETWORKS	REPORTER		NAMED SOURCE		UNNAMED SOURCE		TOTAL
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
ABC	233	60.99	141	36.91	8	2.09	382
CBS	115	52.04	100	45.25	6	2.71	221
NBC	129	44.03	159	54.27	5	1.71	293
MEAN FOR NETWORKS	159	53.24	133.33	44.64	6.33	2.12	298.67

TABLE IV

DISTRIBUTION OF FAVORABLE, UNFAVORABLE, AND NEUTRAL ASSERTIONS BY SOURCE

NETWORKS	REPORTER			NAMED SOURCE			UNNAMED SOURCE			TOTAL
	F	U	N	F	U	N	F	U	N	
ABC										
No.	24	26	183	75	23	43	2	5	1	382
Pct.	6.28	6.81	47.91	19.63	6.02	11.26	0.52	1.31	0.26	
CBS										
No.	6	31	78	42	17	41	1	1	4	221
Pct.	2.71	14.03	35.29	19.00	7.69	18.55	0.45	0.45	1.81	
NBC										
No.	11	19	99	90	15	54	2	2	1	293
Pct.	3.75	6.48	33.79	30.72	5.12	18.43	0.68	0.68	0.34	
MEAN FOR NETWORKS										
No.	13.67	25.33	120	69	18.33	46	1.67	2.67	2	298.67
Pct.	4.58	8.48	40.18	23.10	6.13	15.40	0.56	0.90	0.67	

TABLE V

DISTRIBUTION OF TOTAL FAVORABLE, UNFAVORABLE, AND NEUTRAL ASSERTIONS

NETWORKS	FAVORABLE		UNFAVORABLE		NEUTRAL		TOTAL
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number
ABC	101	26.44	54	14.14	227	59.42	382
CBS	49	22.17	49	22.17	123	55.66	221
NBC	103	35.15	36	12.29	154	52.56	293
MEAN FOR NETWORKS	84.33	28.24	46.33	15.51	168	56.25	298.67